

HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 5: The Early Daoists – Hermits, Shen Dao, and Laozi

Section 11: Summary

- Look at Daoism as an evolving position
 - Focus on natural 道^{dào}^{path} vs. social 道^{dào}^{path}
 - Hermit ethos and Yang Zhu
- More fleshed-out with Shen Dao and anti-language theme
 - Conception of natural 道^{dào}^{path}
- Shen Dao's problem - a 道^{dào}^{path} that doesn't 道^{dào}^{path}
 - Argues for logical determinism
 - Empty tautology - no guidance
- Paradox- it's a 道^{dào}^{path} you are forbidden from actually following; it's self-rejecting
 - Western 'truth -paradox' is related but different
- Treat Laozi as intermediate between Shen Dao and Zhuangzi
 - Textual problems aside, it's an attempt to move away from social *dào* without Shen Dao's fatalism problem
 - Laozi's *dào* is anti-social on grounds that social values dominate our natural behavior
 - Laozi favors 自^{zì}^{self} 然^{rán}^{so} - spontaneity or naturalness
 - Closely related to 自由^{zì yóu}^{self from} [freedom]
 - Laozi rejects the Confucian/Mohist social project; society will dominate our nature
- Laozi's anti-language stance has its own contradiction
 - 無^{wú}^{lack} 為^{wéi}^{deem:treat as}
 - If you want to 無^{wú}^{lack} 為^{wéi}^{deem:treat as}

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- Then you should 無 *wú*^{lack} *not* 為 *wei*^{treating as}
- Rest of the *DaoDe Jing* is mind-opening re. conventional 道 *dào*^{path}
 - Reversing values of conventional 道 *dào*^{path}
 - A way of freeing ourselves from domination by social convention
 - Can also be viewed as an answer to Mencius
 - Hard to separate the social from the natural
- Laozi is opposed to government but also consumerism
 - A poignant voice for pacifism and feminism